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ABSTRACT

Intends to facilitate discussion between the British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer and degree-granting institutions regarding the feasibility of establishing new transfer arrangements for students who have completed an associate degree in a British Columbian (BC) college or university college and are subsequently admitted to another degree-granting institution. Focuses on the initiative of providing improved transfer for associate degrees as transfer difficulties created by the complexity of the BC transfer environment increases. Asserts that new agreements for the transfer of completed associate degrees, as well as admission priority for students holding an associate degree would achieve this end. Recommends that an "Associate Degree Transfer Policy" could guarantee a minimum of 60 transfer credits but still require students to complete all lower and upper division requirements for their baccalaureate degree. Under any new arrangement respecting transfer for the associate degree, institutions would maintain appropriate control over the academic requirements for all degrees, majors, and concentrations. Under ideal conditions potential transfer students would plan their selection of courses for the associate degree by including the requirements for majors within the electives. Students who failed to do so could be required to complete additional credits beyond the 60 specified in the associate degree. Priority admission over all other transfer institutions could be granted to any student who has completed an associate degree. (VWC)

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The Associate Degree as a Transfer Credential

A Discussion Paper

May 20, 1999

Prepared by:

Associate Degree Review Task Force

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BRITISH COLUMBIA COUNCIL ON ADMISSIONS & TRANSFER

TC 000 723

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A Discussion Paper

Prepared by

Associate Degree Review Task Force
Peter Jones, Chairperson

May 20, 1999

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This paper is intended to facilitate discussion between the B.C. Council on Admissions and Transfer (BCCAT) and degree granting institutions regarding the feasibility of establishing new transfer arrangements for students who have completed an associate degree in a BC college or university college and are subsequently admitted to a university, a different university college, or other degree granting institution.

Since the late 1960's, transfer credit for Arts and Science courses between B.C. colleges and universities has been granted primarily on the basis of an assessment of course-to-course equivalency. During the past few years BCCAT has engaged in a thorough review and assessment of the current course-to-course transfer system to determine its continuing viability. This review involved an examination of transfer systems in other jurisdictions, the completion of a number of research studies measuring the effectiveness of our current system, and extensive consultation with all B.C. public post secondary institutions.[1]

The Council has concluded that although the current system is working reasonably well, it could and should be enhanced. This conclusion was driven by a recognition that during the past decade credit transfer arrangements have become progressively more difficult to establish and maintain as a direct result of the rapid expansion in the number of degree granting institutions. This expansion includes three new universities (most prominently UNBC) and five university colleges, many of which are developing their own baccalaureate degree programs in traditional arts and science disciplines. In many instances, college departments are no longer able to design a set of lower division courses that will enable students to satisfy the lower division requirements at each degree granting institution. Furthermore, students do not always know to which institution they wish to transfer and can never be sure to which institution they will be admitted.

The Council determined that with the voluntary cooperation of both sending and receiving institutions it would undertake a number of initiatives to improve transfer. These include increasing the flexibility of first and second year prerequisites and program requirements for transfer students entering receiving institutions, developing clearly defined sets of course requirements for particular programs to facilitate student planning, and providing improved transfer arrangements for associate degrees and/or other equivalent credentials.

While other initiatives will be addressed through separate projects, this discussion paper focuses on the third initiative – providing improved transfer for associate degrees.

In 1991, BCCAT recommended to the Minister the establishment of the Associate of Arts Degree and the Associate of Science Degree. The primary purpose for this new provincial credential was to certify successful completion of a specified selection of two years of

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[1] The various research reports, newsletters, and related publications can be read on the publications menu of the BCCAT web site at: http://www.bccat.bc.ca/bccat/menuartic.htm Of particular interest is a paper titled: Transfer: What's the Problem? Special Report. April 1999

university transferable academic arts and science courses. The Council agreed at the outset that the curriculum requirements should reflect those characteristics that help define an educated person. Three criteria were also stipulated as follows:

Standards: The associate degree must be an academically sound and publicly credible credential which would be an achievement goal for students and a benchmark of academic success in the eyes of the general public and potential employers.

Simplicity: The associate degree must have a common set of specified requirements which would be readily understood by students, advisers and faculty.

Transfer: The requirements of the associate degree would not disadvantage students who chose to transfer to another college or to a baccalaureate program.

Although the associate degree was not originally conceived as a vehicle to ease transfer, the Council is now of the opinion that the associate degree should also serve the purpose of enhancing student access and transferability. This position is influenced by the need to address transfer difficulties created by the increasing complexity of the B.C. transfer environment. We believe that new agreements for the transfer of completed associate degrees, as well as admission priority for students holding an associate degree would achieve this end. How might such policies work?

Currently, one of the key requirements of the associate degree is that all courses must have transfer credit at *any one* of the four traditional universities: SFU, UBC, UNBC or UVic. In reality, most arts and science courses transfer to three or four of SFU, UBC, UVic and UNBC. An "Associate Degree Transfer Policy" could guarantee a minimum of 60 transfer credits but still require students to complete all lower and upper division requirements for their baccalaureate degree. *The effect of granting such transfer would be to guarantee that students receive transfer credits for every course they complete as part of the associate degree even if any particular course does not have a course-to-course transfer equivalency at the receiving institution.* Implicit in such a transfer policy is recognition that a course that has formal transfer credit at one or more B.C. public university is worthy of recognition for transfer credit at other degree granting institutions in B.C. The caveat of needing to meet all baccalaureate degree requirements protects the integrity of the standards established by the institution for students wishing to complete their undergraduate degree. Currently, UNBC has a transfer policy similar to that described above.

It is important to emphasize that, under any new arrangement respecting transfer for the associate degree, *institutions would maintain appropriate control over the academic requirements for all degrees, majors and concentrations.* Under ideal conditions potential transfer students will plan their selection of courses for the associate degree by including the requirements for majors within the electives. Students who fail to plan accordingly, or who change their expectations regarding majors or degrees, may be required to complete additional credits beyond the 60 specified in the associate degree.

The possibility of some form of admission priority for students completing an associate degree would also contribute significantly to its credibility in the eyes of students. Priority admission over all other transfer students could be granted to any student who has completed an associate degree. However, institutions would still be free to set minimum admission requirements for transfer students that may be higher than those required for an associate degree. At the present time, both SFU and UNBC provide priority admission to students who have completed an associate degree over all other transfer students.

Students who successfully complete associate degrees have demonstrated the level of persistence and academic competence needed for success in post-secondary education. They have also completed a two-year credential that emphasizes both breadth and depth of achievement. As such they constitute a group of students with high potential to succeed and to contribute to the academic reputation of a degree program.

The Council has established an Associate Degree Review Task Force with representation from universities, university colleges, and colleges, chaired by Dr. Peter Jones, past President of the University College of the Fraser Valley. The Task Force is currently reviewing the curricular requirements of the degree as well as examining the issue of the development of an "Associate Degree Transfer Policy." Attached is a set of revised requirements that are currently being discussed. These draft revisions reflect modest changes to provide greater flexibility in the requirements and establish a minimum overall grade point average of 2.0 (C letter grade or equivalent). One question we would like to explore further is whether or not courses that transfer to the Open University and the university colleges should also count towards an associate degree.

The Council would welcome a dialogue with the universities and university colleges to discuss the potential changes to the degree and to determine the feasibility of reaching agreement on transfer for associate degrees. The extensive consultations we have undertaken have convinced us that establishing improved transfer credit and admission priority for students with an associate degree would be a significant step forward in facilitating a more flexible admissions and transfer system in our Province.

BCCAT ASSOCIATE DEGREE REVIEW TASK FORCE

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